

BOOK NOTICE

JAMES McWILLIAMS. 2013. **The Pecan: A History of America's Native Nut**. (ISBN-13: 978-0-292-74916-0, hbk). University of Texas Press, PO Box 7819, Austin, Texas 78713-7819, U.S.A. (**Orders:** www.utexaspress.com, 1-800-252-3206). \$20.00, 192 pp., 3 b&w photos, index, 5½" × 8 ½".

From the publisher: What would Thanksgiving be without pecan pie? New Orleans without pecan pralines? Southern cooks would have to hang up their aprons without America's native nut, whose popularity has spread far beyond the tree's natural home. But as familiar as the pecan is, most people don't know the fascinating story of how native pecan trees fed Americans for thousands of years until the nut was "improved" a little more than a century ago—and why that rapid domestication actually threatens the pecan's long-term future.

In *The Pecan*, acclaimed writer and historian James McWilliams explores the history of America's most important commercial nut. He describes how essential the pecan was for Native Americans—by some calculations, an average pecan harvest had the food value of nearly 150,000 bison. McWilliams explains that, because of its natural edibility, abundance, and ease of harvesting, the pecan was left in its natural state longer than any other commercial fruit or nut crop in America. Yet once the process of "improvement" began, it took less than a century for the pecan to be almost totally domesticated. Today, more than 300 million pounds of pecans are produced every year in the United States—and as much as half of that total might be exported to China, which has fallen in love with America's native nut. McWilliams also warns that, as ubiquitous as the pecan has become, it is vulnerable to a "perfect storm" of economic threats and ecological disasters that could wipe it out within a generation. This lively history suggests why the pecan deserves to be recognized as a true American heirloom.

Preface

Acknowledgments

Introduction: Cracking the Nut

Chapter 1. The Native Americans' Nut

Chapter 2. "Pekan Nuttrees": Europeans Encounter the Pecan

Chapter 3. "... the Forest into an Orchard": Passive Cultivation on the Texas Frontier

Chapter 4. Antoine's Graft: The Birth of the Improved Pecan, 1822–1900

Chapter 5. "To Make These Little Trees": The Culture of Pecan Improvement, 1900–1925

Chapter 6. "Pecans for the World": The Pecan Goes Industrial, 1920–1945

Chapter 7. "In Almost Any Recipe ... Pecans May Be Used": American Consumers Embrace the Pecan, 1940–1960

Chapter 8. "China Wants Our Nuts": The Pecan Goes Global

Epilogue. The Future of Pecans

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JAMES McWILLIAMS is a historian and writer whose books include *Just Food: Where Locovores Get It Wrong and How We Can Truly Eat Responsibly* and *A Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America*. His writing on food, agriculture, and animals has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Harpers*, *The Atlantic*, *The Washington Post*, *Slate*, *Forbes*, *Travel and Leisure*, *Los Angeles Times*, *International Herald Tribune*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Texas Observer*, where he has been a contributing writer since 2002. McWilliams is also a contributor to *freakonomics.com* and a winner of the Hiatt Prize in the Humanities.